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Study on the Effectiveness of a Videocassette Program Approach for Parental Involvement in an Urban School

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STUDY ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A VIDEOCASSETTE PROGRAM
APPROACH FOR PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN AN URBAN SCHOOL

THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the
Department of Education and Human Development
State University of New York
College at Brockport
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Education

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the initial effectiveness of the program, Staying Connected: Parents in Kindergarten as an additional tool to supplement the efforts of one school in Rochester, NY to promote parental involvement.

The subjects were sixty-four respondents to a survey sent to all the families (137) with children in the kindergarten classes for the school year 94-95.

The survey was designed to obtain information on parent perceptions about the content and quality of the program as well as their receptiveness to the general idea of using videocassette technology as a tool for parental involvement.

A statistical analysis was conducted on answers of a quantitative nature, while a qualitative analysis was conducted on the rest of the data to look for trends and suggestions about how to improve the program.

The statistical analysis results indicated moderately high ratings for the program in general. The highest ratings were given to the questions and statements reflecting opinions about: quality of presentation; replicability of activities; access to materials for the activities; and usefulness of information. The lowest ratings were given to questions and statements related to opinions about new learning from the program, and actual modifications in the schoolwork routines at home.

The qualitative analysis results reflected a congruency with the information obtained in the statistical analysis, and yielded more specific information on the ratings from the survey. The subjects also provided suggestions about how to improve the program.

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Chapter I

Statement of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the initial perceptions on the effectiveness of using a program that integrates videocassette technology and an illustrated pamphlet for the purpose of educating and engaging parents of kindergarten students at home. The study concentrated on finding information about parent receptiveness towards the approach used to implement the program; usefulness of the content, accounts of increased parent-child interaction at home; and feedback on what modifications would be needed to improve the program.

Introduction

Most of the research on parental involvement in children's education shows the definite advantages of promoting this practice for everyone involved in the process (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom 1993; Louks, 1992; Powell, 1989). However, promoting parental involvement in urban schools might not be an easy task when considering the complex nature of their population.

In recent years, the variations in family environments and activities have created a need for schools to reconsider their traditional approaches to parental involvement particularly in urban areas (Jennings, 1990). For some time much of the research on the condition of urban America has been suggesting the difficult challenge faced by

urban schools as a result of an increase in conditions such as crime, drug addiction, welfare dependency, poor housing, single parenting, increase in latchkey children, homelessness, and more (Ascher, 1988; Children's Defense Fund, 1994; Swick, 1991). The implication is that for many people in urban settings, their daily struggle for survival may at times make it impossible to reach out to an educational institution that not always can provide relief for immediate needs. It is also agreed that these conditions are most likely to prevail partly as a consequence of the migration of middle class America from the inner cities to the suburbs.

The experience related to the account mentioned above motivated an urban school in the Rochester City School District to act upon the problem of reaching and engaging parents more effectively at the beginning of their children's schooling.

Previous efforts by the school to promote parental involvement at the kindergarten level had been traditional approaches such as: open houses, workshops at the school, newsletters, parent groups, etc.. These approaches, although effective under the right circumstances, were not yielding the results expected by the school in terms of reaching and engaging all of its parents at the beginning of their children's education in the public school system.

The school had the strong belief that the information parents missed at the beginning of the year may be the most critical in terms of preparing the whole family for the kindergarten experience and

thereafter. All together, these were the factors accounting for the production of the program, Staying Connected: Parents in Kindergarten.

Program Description

The program was written and produced by two kindergarten teachers at the James P. B. Duffy Elementary School #12 in Rochester, NY in collaboration with Eastman Kodak. The program was designed as an additional tool in the school's efforts to increase parent-school communication, as well as to develop a more congruent parent-school participation in the children's academic experience.

The content of the program focuses on informing parents of kindergarten students about kindergarten, the kindergarten learner (Section I), and providing them with tips and activities they can perform at home (Section II). The program has two components, a videocassette and a pamphlet.

The rationale sought in developing the program was to use a videocassette and an illustrated pamphlet to disseminate the same information given to kindergarten parents in most of the in-school events at the beginning of the year. This new approach would give them at home a better accessibility and control of this information particularly as it relates to their management of time or the hardships impeding them from participating at the school. It would also help parents enhance their children's academic experiences by modeling replicable activities performed with common household items.

The program was tailored to the school in order to introduce the teachers, the classrooms, the activities, and ways in which other parents participate in the school throughout the year. School staff, parents, and students participated as actors and consultants in the production of the program.

Some generalizations were extracted from the producers' experiences as teachers in the school. These generalizations served as the basis for developing the rationale for the program as well as for prioritizing its content. These are as follows:

1-Many parents do not think of themselves as teachers. This view makes it difficult to establish a partnership with the school as the teacher is seen as the sole provider of academic instruction.

2-Many parents think of kindergarten as a place where children go "just to play". The concept of "play" may differ in the contexts of home and school.

3-Many parents' schema of kindergarten is that of their own experience fifteen to twenty-five years ago. There has been many changes in early childhood and primary education in the last twenty years.

4-Many parents know their children as persons but might have little knowledge of their children as five year old learners.

5-Many parents need accessible information to guide themselves in helping children in their new academic experiences. Factors such as transportation, unsafe neighborhoods, language, work schedules, etc.

may impede this accessibility.

6-Many parents want to and do help their children at home, however, the number of activities they perform may be limited or even inappropriate for their children's developmental level.

The program was given to all the parents of kindergarten children during the second week of classes in the 94-95 school year. The intention was for the parents to implement the program at home for three weeks at their own discretion, or following a suggested use of the program outlined in a letter of introduction. Upon completion of the program, parents were instructed to return the videocassette and keep the pamphlet, which contains the same information as the videocassette.

Problem

The idea of developing a program using videocassette technology to educate and engage parents in their children's education at home, although not a new idea (e.g., commercially available videos on parenting), is a relatively new concept as a tool for individual schools to reach their parents. Given this situation, the implication for the producers was that little or no research was found that could give a better direction on how to design a program (of this type) effective in terms of parent receptiveness to the school's approach, usefulness of content, and increased parent-child academic interaction at home.

In addition, after the production was completed, the school had no specific plan in place to obtain feedback from the intended audience. The

absence of these data would make it difficult to make the appropriate modifications to improve the different components of the program;

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the initial perceptions on the effectiveness of using a program that integrates videocassette technology and an illustrated pamphlet for the purpose of educating and engaging parents of kindergarten students at home. The study concentrated on finding information about parent receptiveness towards the approach used to implement the program; usefulness of the content, accounts of increased parent-child interaction at home; and feedback on what modifications would be needed to improve the program.

The data obtained from the study were intended to answer the following general questions:

- 1-What percentage of respondents implemented the program?
- 2-Was there any pattern in the reasons given for not implementing the program?
- 3-How useful was the content of the program to individual parents?
- 4-How useful do individual parents consider the content of the program to be for other parents?
- 5-What was the general sense about the quality of presentation(video, manual), communication, replicability of the activities, and accessibility to the materials needed for the activities?
- 6-Were there any modifications to parent-child schoolwork routines at

home as a result of the implementation of the program?

7-Were there any recommendations for improvements in the program?

Need for the Study:

Even with the wealth of research on school-parent partnership (Dauber & Epstein, 1989, 1991; Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom 1993; 1993; Louks, 1992; Powell, 1989), the reality is that schools still do not reach many parents.

Powell (1989) states that there is still a need for research on program services in relation to different types of families and the process of change in parents. Also, key program delivery problems such as how to reach hard-to-reach populations and what program practices enhance parents' receptivity to innovative ideas, need to be addressed.

The little but growing research on parental belief systems suggests that many parents hold a variety of beliefs about children and parenting that influences their practices at home (Miller, 1988). For example, one of such beliefs is that the job of educating children belongs to the school, "just as they don't have to be involved in putting out fires once the fire department has been given that job" (Seeley, 1989, p. 46). The implications of beliefs like this one might be contributing to some of the problems many parent-involvement programs have. Thus, it is necessary for schools to consider this area of research when developing their own programs.

One area of research where educators have many questions

unanswered is the field of videocassette technology and the effects of its use on the family and school partnership (Levy, 1987).

The role of technology in the American family has been studied to a great extent. Of all these new technologies, television has had the greatest influence in terms of its impact on all aspects of family life ranging from time spent on television viewing to the role it plays on children's education.

In conjunction with television, the use of videocassette recorders/players (VCR/ VCP) has begun to be looked upon as another piece of technology with the same potential to influence family life as television. Although there has been some research done on VCR/VCP use and its effects on various aspects related to children's learning and school (Levy, 1987; Rubin & Bantz, 1987), surprisingly there has been little scholarly attention paid to its potential role as a way to strengthen the family and school partnership (Levy, 1987).

This study addressed in a limited way the research needs stated above. It also kept the implied objective of helping set a documented precedent for other urban schools that might be planning on using a similar approach to reach their populations.

Definition of Terms

Note: The definition given for the purpose of this study may have some variations throughout the literature.

1-program implementation: Actions taken by the intended population to

acquire knowledge from the program's content and activities.

2-parent/ family involvement: Action's taken by any person considered parent or family of a child to improve or maintain her academic achievement. These actions may be through direct or indirect collaboration with other accountable parties to the child's education. Other terms may include: school-family partnership; home-school relations.

Limitations of the Study

The findings reported in this study should be considered in the context of its limitations.

The first limitation pertains to the survey's design as it relates to its demographic data. The overwhelming majority of respondents (78%) were females. This discrepancy may have affected the study's conclusions about the overall receptiveness of the program to include the male population. The survey did not make provisions to obtain separate data from each individual member implementing the program.

The second limitation relates to the population who did not complete the survey. Although the return rate (47%) of the survey is generally regarded as acceptable for studies of this nature (Cohen & Manion, 1994), the study did not pursue more aggressively the reasons of non-respondents for not implementing the program.

The third limitation relates to the non-English speaking population in the school. It is difficult to know with any certainty how much the

English proficiency levels of limited-English speaking parents affected the responses in relation to quality and quantity. The survey was not administered in any other language.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the initial perceptions on the effectiveness of using a program that integrates videocassette technology and an illustrated pamphlet for the purpose of educating and engaging parents of kindergarten students at home. The study concentrated on finding information about parent receptiveness towards the approach used to implement the program; usefulness of the content, accounts of increased parent-child interaction at home; and feedback on what modifications would be needed to improve the program.

Review of Literature

Historically, early childhood education in the United States has considered parental involvement as a very important element in the overall development of children. In urban areas, even before the institutionalization of kindergarten, the charity kindergarten movement in the late nineteenth century had developed a comprehensive family orientation that included parental education for families living in poverty. By the early twentieth century, the idea (at that time) that all mothers should be involved in their children's schooling became more popular (Schlossman, 1976). Since then, many government, industry, and school parent-involvement programs had been implemented with various degrees of success (Powell, 1989).

This long history of design and implementation of parent involvement programs have yielded a wealth of practical research (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom 1993; Powell, 1989) that gives educators solid basis for the improvement of existing programs, or the development of innovative ones.

The bulk of this research suggests at least two major areas that must be considered when designing parent-involvement programs. One relates to the family environments, and the other relates to the importance of school environments to parent involvement.

Family Environments

The history of research in this area suggests clear advantages for children whose parents support and encourage school activities. The benefits include higher levels of school achievement, interest in school learning; and number of years of schooling children will receive (Dave, 1963; Epstein, 1983; Epstein & McPartland, 1979; Majoribanks, 1979; Scott-Jones, 1984). Even international comparisons show the high academic success of students from Asian countries, which many attribute to the priority their families give to education (Stevenson, 1993).

There is little disagreement among scholars about the idea that a parent is a child's first and most important teacher. A great deal of learning occurs before children begin school. By age three, for example, children have acquired more than half the language they will use throughout their lives (White, 1987). This premise has become the basis

for the most effective parent involvement programs today (Powell, 1990; U.S. Department of Education, 1994). On the other hand, there is still a lot of work to do in communicating this idea to parents, especially in the urban setting. In a study of findings from the implementation of the Follow Through Program in the first twenty years, Olmsted (1991) points out that many parents do not perceive themselves as teachers, even as teachers of their own children.

Many recent studies have focused on the variations in family environments and activities, and their effect on overall student's performance. The results of these studies suggest that on the average, families with higher socioeconomic status and education are more involved in their children's education and their children achieve more. (Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Coleman, 1987; Entwisle, Cadigan, & Pallas, 1986; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Lareau, 1987; Stevenson & Baker, 1987; Useem, 1990). These studies also point out that for many poor parents, practices of involvement compensate for lack of education and lower income.

In spite of the encouraging research, the fact is that parental involvement is still a challenge for parents as well for schools. One variable in family environments that is drawing attention is that of the little time spent by many parents on school related activities at home. This variable is considered a factor of the sociocultural changes that have been occurring in America mentioned in the previous chapter. In 1993,

Finney reported that forty percent of parents across the country believe that they are not devoting enough time to their children's education. Similarly, the Families and Work Institute reported in 1994 that 66 % of employed parents with children under 18 say they do not have enough time for their children.

The implication is that many children are left at home alone, unsupervised or watching television for hours a day. Also, working parents are often faced with trying to complete all household duties in the limited time available. Even if parents have some time with their children (within the constraints of the day) many don't see school related activities in the home as "quality time" with their children (Families and Work Institute, 1994).

Other studies reflect a recurring theme in which the need for the promotion of more consistent parent-involvement practices from the part of the schools has become evident. There is evidence of well designed and implemented parental involvement practices at the preschool and elementary grades initiated by schools. However, there is also evidence of a dramatic decline in these practices with each passing grade (Epstein, 1986). Baker and Stevenson(1986) suggest that most parents help their children at home but do not know whether they are doing the right things or doing things right. Other findings show that most parents want information on how to help their children at home and how to stay involved in their children's education. Over ninety percent of parents of

elementary and middle grades students believe that the school should tell them how to help at home (Epstein & Herrick 1991; National Commission on Children, 1991).

School Environments

Variations in family environments and activities have created a need for schools to reconsider their traditional approaches to parent involvement particularly in the urban areas (Jennings, 1990). In the inner cities, the challenge for school districts is to try to translate the research into practice that is relevant to their sociocultural context of today.

Many studies addressing this subject point at the need for changes in definitions and views of parent involvement to accommodate the variations in family environments and practices.

The concept of parent involvement, for example, for many in the educational community for a long time has only been related to school visits and volunteer services by the parents. This restrictive view of parental involvement, many have argued, cannot be operational, especially in the context of the inner city schools. This view can also create misconceptions regarding the role of parents and educators in their collaborative effort in education (Epstein 1992; Jennings, 1990; Olmsted, 1991). Leitch and Tangri (1988) point out that teachers and parents disagree in their ideas of whether parents are involved or want to be involved. Likewise, the conclusions of Dauber and Epstein (1992) in a study of parent attitudes and practices of involvement in urban Chapter 1

programs.

Definitions of parental involvement have to be crafted to serve the intended community in the context of its population, the times, and location. In fact, one component of many districts' discussions on the subject of parental involvement is their definition of such in relation to their community. Much of the literature being produced addressing parent involvement tries to communicate new views that are becoming more accepted for their operational elements. For example, the term parent involvement has been referred to more often as family engagement to recognize the potential influence of all family members. And also to recognize that in urban areas the child's family in many cases may not necessarily be the parent.

Another idea that is changing is that parental involvement cannot be defined only as school visitations and volunteer work. Many educational institutions and organizations are modifying this concept to communicate that the involvement by parents in the home is as valuable as their involvement in school (Epstein, 1992; National Center on Education and the Economy, 1995).

The area of research that looks at effective practices in parent involvement programs concentrates on the question of how can schools enable more families to become involved?

The studies dealing with this question have yielded credible information on practices that are being promoted by much of the literature

on this topic as guidelines for school districts' parent involvement programs (Louks, 1992; Powell, 1990; U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Much of this research tries to dissect the characteristics that successful programs such as the Head Start, Follow Through, Family Math, and many others have in common and that can be replicated (McKey, Condelli, Ganson, Barrett, McConkey, & Plantz, 1985; Olmsted, 1991; Sloane, 1989).

One consistent generalization that is often made is that programs which provide more structure and concrete activities seem to be more effective than others (Goodson & Hess, 1976). Some researchers have emphasized the importance of linking the information presented in parent education to the parent's own experiences. One example is by giving the parents the opportunity to work with their children in the parent education program (Florin & Doeckei, 1983). Other evidence supports the conclusion that programs that allow maximum interaction, either among parents or between parents and teachers, tend to produce more positive results (Janhom, 1983; Slaughter, 1963).

Teachers also have vast influence in parent-involvement practices. Epstein (1986) concluded that parents' involvement in their children's education was more likely to be influenced by teachers who were leaders in the use of parent-involvement practices. Teacher practices that included improving parents' knowledge about child development, parenting skills, and the quality of parent-child, parent-

parent, and parent-teacher interaction were the most effective.

Videocassette Technology and Parent Involvement

Among the most popular technologies available today, videocassette technology is regarded by many as having a great potential as a tool for the enhancement of parent involvement. Since its introduction to the mainstream market in the late 1970's, this technology has thrived under conditions that are also proper for the goals of many organizations to promote education (Folio & Richay, 1990; Holsworth & Currie, 1982; Krendl, Clark, Dawson, & Troiano, 1993; Wartella, Heintz, Aidman, & Mazzarella, 1990). This conclusion is not a surprise when considering the conditions that have made it possible for this technology to proliferate in this nation.

The first set of conditions alludes to general rules of supply and demand, and good strategic marketing. For example, by the early 1980's the number of television sets in America's households was at a strong 97.9% and by 1993 it had increased to 98.3%. This many television sets also meant a potentially large market for videocassette recorders (VCR). A sharp decline in prices made VCRs almost as accessible to the population as television sets. The number of VCRs increased from a 1% in 1980 to a 77% by 1993.

Another contribution has been the realization by the movie industry of the potential profits of this market. This allowed the movie rental business to become the fastest growing industry from 1985-90 as it

became easier for consumers to access any video recording at their convenience. Also, the advances in the technology that made the VCR more user-friendly contributed a great deal to this phenomenon (TV & Cable Fact Book, 1992; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994).

The second set of conditions alludes to the psychological effects of the uses of VCR. Most of these are the ones reported by studies on this subject. For example, in a study conducted on the utility of VCRs, Rubin and Bantz (1987) concluded that time-shifting and convenience were the two most important uses for this technology. A similar study by Harvey and Rothe (1986) on the previous year had already been pointing at the aspect of viewer control as an appealing element of the use of VCRs. The ideas of control over commercials and viewing time, regulating children's viewing, and the skip-search-repeat modes were found to be increasingly appealing to the public.

Perhaps like any other phenomenon of this nature, the introduction of videocassette technology and its rapid proliferation also has implications for research on its impact on society.

The early studies related to this technology explored its impact on the quality of the human condition. Much of the early research on the subject expanded on questions of concerns of a sociopolitical nature closely related to the current research on the impact of television. For example, questions about the effects of easier accessibility to pornographic and violent material, and changes in home environments

were reported to be the dominant subjects for the early research. Today much of the research still focuses on these questions (Cohen, Levy, & Golden, 1988; Dorr & Kunkel, 1990; Greenberg & Heeter, 1987; Levy, 1987; Paik & Comstock, 1994).

Although VCR technology had been in use for educational purposes in different institutions and organizations since the mid 70's not many educators had realized the potential benefits of this technology if and when it reached the average family home. In the mid to late 80's, at the high of the VCR and videocassette market, this technology began to make its presence more visible in the educational arena as an additional element in programs that reached outside the school (Chrispeels, Bourta, & Daugherty, 1988; Singer & Kelly, 1984). This phenomenon also had its implications for research.

One implication to which Greenberg and Heeter (1987) pointed out in their study about VCRs and young people, was the lack of studies on "how children use or are affected by VCRs" (p. 510). This conclusion was later supported by Levy (1987) in a study about problems of VCR research.

Another implication is that although there are educational programs that include videocassettes for promoting parental involvement in the home, most of the ones found for the purpose of this study presented them in addition to other forms of communication. As a result little scholarly attention has been given to research on the effectiveness

of videocassettes alone as a tool. One example is the San Diego Public Schools. The schools in this district provide information from workshops on videocassettes in addition to other forms of communication such as newsletters, tape recordings, computerized messages, etc. (Chrispeels, Bourta & Daugherty, 1988). A more recent example of the same approach was a Chapter 1 project for parental involvement in New York City (D'Angelo, 1991). The effectiveness of these programs however, especially the videocassette element, has not been studied in depth.

The only program found in which the use of videocassette technology constituted its main element was The Educational Television Intervention Programs Project (ETIPS) (Folio & Richey, 1990). This program was produced with the objective of assisting families of special needs infants in rural communities. The information found related to this program was in the form of a paper describing the model of implementation. Based on feedback from the families, the producers concluded that the videocassette approach to implement this program had many benefits. However, this conclusion was not based on empirical research methodology.

In spite of the lack of research on the effectiveness of video parental involvement programs, educators seem to be comfortable enough with the idea to recommend this approach as an effective way to elicit the collaboration between school and the home. Their suggested practices are an extension of well researched educational

methodologies recommended for the use of television in the home. For example, the application of television instruction as a useful method of home-based training of parents of preschool-age children with handicaps has been documented for a number of years (Currie, Holsworth, & Morlan, 1976). Other studies on the efficacy on televised home instruction found it to be most effective for parent training when combined with traditional print media (Holsworth & Currie, 1982).

The conclusions of these studies and others seem to have generated enough credibility on the part of the experts in the area of parental involvement. Perhaps enough credibility as to qualify the integration of VCR technology and school related activities in the home as a viable addition to the approaches already in practice; even in the absence of well documented research on this subject. The recent literature seems to suggest that as long as the rationale for the program is rooted on the generalizations about the effective program practices yielded by the vast research on this subject, this approach should also be effective (Epstein 1992; Morgan, Alexander, Shanahan, & Harris 1990; Rubin & Bantz 1987; U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

Summary

The wealth of research on parental involvement suggests many benefits for children, their families, and schools from activities that promote school related learning in the home.

In the urban setting parental involvement had become a difficult

challenge due to changes of a sociocultural nature in the last two decades. Variations in the family environments have created a need for schools to reconsider their traditional approaches to parental involvement. Many educational organizations have begun to negotiate this task by redefining parental involvement to serve the context of the times and place of their community.

The long history of research on parental involvement has enabled educators to dissect the characteristics of effective programs. In line with the task of modifying traditional approaches to parental involvement, and making new designs for such programs, VCR technology seems to promise a high degree of success if integrated with the effective practices outlined by researchers.

Although there has been little scholarly attention given to VCR technology alone as it relates to parental involvement, educators seem to be comfortable qualifying it as a viable addition to the approaches already in practice.

Chapter III

Method

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the initial perceptions on the effectiveness of using a program that integrates videocassette technology and an illustrated pamphlet for the purpose of educating and engaging parents of kindergarten students at home. The study concentrated on finding information about parent receptiveness towards the approach used to implement the program; usefulness of the content, accounts of increased parent-child interaction at home; and feedback on what modifications would be needed to improve the program.

Subjects

The subjects in this study were all the kindergarten children and their families (137) who attended the James P.B. Duffy School#12 in Rochester, NY for the school year 1994-95. Due to the fact that the school is a magnet school and many of the subjects were provided with transportation to school from the majority of the neighborhoods in the area, the participants represented a cross section of the population living in this medium size city. The results and discussion of the study are based on the responses of 64 (47%) families.

Materials

The materials for this study included the program, Staying

Connected: Parents in Kindergarten, which consists of a videocassette and a pamphlet. The videocassette includes two viewing sections. Section one is a twelve-minute informational section designed to educate parents about kindergarten and the kindergarten learner. Section two consists of twenty short viewing tips and activities designed for parents to be able to replicate at their convenience. Most of the materials for the activities in this section are common household items. Half of the activities (10) are specific to the area of mathematics, and the other half (10) are specific to the area of language arts.

An illustrated pamphlet was developed to accompany the videocassette. The information contained in the pamphlet is the same as in the videocassette. It also provided parents with materials such as letter and number cards to be used in some of the activities.

A letter of introduction describing the program as well as providing directions for a suggested use was also issued to accompany the videocassette and the pamphlet.

Finally, a survey was developed by the examiner to obtain data in three main areas of the study; demographics, completion of program, and general effectiveness of the parental involvement approach.

Procedure

The program was issued to all kindergarten children (137) during the first week of September of the 1994-95 school year in a packet that

contained a letter of introduction, the survey, the videocassette, and the manual . Specific directions for parents were included in the letter of introduction.

In the letter, the participating families were asked to implement the program at their own pace. It also made available a suggested implementation for participants needing more direction.

The participants were also asked to implement the program for three weeks and then return the videocassette and the survey to their children's teacher. The pamphlet was to be kept at home for future references on activities and other helpful information. The return rate on the survey was 64 out 137 (47%). A consideration that qualifies the validity of this study is that a percentage of forty-seven responses is generally regarded as a relatively high percentage for studies of this nature (Cohen & Manion, 1994).

Analysis

The data on the sixty-four surveys received were analyzed in two ways. First, a statistical analysis was conducted on answers of a quantitative nature. The responses in the area of demographics were analyzed in a weighted percentage of respondents to the particular survey item. A weighted mean was used to compare the answers on Likert scales. Second, a qualitative analysis was conducted on written responses in order to place them into the categories of the feedback

intended by the study. These categories include; program implementation, program quality, and suggestions for improvement.

Chapter IV

Analysis of Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the initial perceptions on the effectiveness of using a program that integrates videocassette technology and an illustrated pamphlet for the purpose of educating and engaging parents of kindergarten students at home. The study concentrated on finding information about parent receptiveness towards the approach used to implement the program; usefulness of the content, accounts of increased parent-child interaction at home; and feedback on what modifications would be needed to improve the program.

Results

The overall results show a high rate ($M=89\%$) of responses for the statements and questions in the survey. The responses were analyzed in a weighted percentage of respondents to the particular survey item using $N=64$ as the total sample and $n=x$ for percentages of the sub samples. A mean was calculated for gender and number of children as well as for the scores on the Likert scales for the results on program quality and responses for each area. All other survey information in narrative form is analyzed at the end of the chapter.

Survey Data

Demographics

The mean responses to questions in this area of the study ($N=64$)

was 56 (88%) (table 1). A total of 48 (75%) of the respondents reported a mean age of 30.4 years. The mean for the number of children was 2.7, reported by 63 (98%) of the respondents.

An overwhelming majority of the respondents ($n=54$) were female (50 /78%), and the remainder (4 /6%) were male. The responses to the question about marital status ($n=54$) , however, were more balanced with 28 (44%) single parents, and 26 (41%) married.

The data related to the educational achievement of the respondents ($n=57$) comprised a range divided into three levels. Most of the respondents 33 (52%) reported to have had education at the college level. At the high school level (grades 10th-12th) the data showed 19 (14%) responses. And 5 (8%) indicated to have an education level below the 9th grade.

The number of respondents ($n=58$) who reported to live in the neighborhood of the school was 38 (59%), a remainder of 20 (31%) reported their residence to be in other neighborhoods around the city.

Program Implementation

The mean responses to questions in this area of the study ($N=64$) was 61 (95%) (table 2). The total of responses about having used the specific components of the program was 58 (91%). Only 1(2%) of the respondents used the manual as the main tool for the implementation of the program. The rest reported having used only the videocassette or both, which accounts for 57 (98%) of the responses to the questions on

this section.

The total of responses about having completed the program was 63 (98%). On this section 48 (75%) of the respondents felt they had completed the program. In contrast, 15 (23%) responses were negative.

Program Quality

The respondents found the information in Section 1 to be easy to understand, useful to them, and thought that it was useful to parents in general. The mean for the question about whether they learned any new information was lower in comparison with the other other questions in this section (3.6 to 4.0+). Nevertheless, it was above the average on the 1-5 point rating on the scale (table 3).

The responses for Section 2 also reflect results similar to the ones in the previous section. The respondents also found the information in this section to be easy to understand, useful to them, and thought that it was useful to parents in general. Also, in this section the mean for the question about whether they learn any new information was lower in comparison to the other questions (3.7 to 4.0+). The respondents thought that the activities were easy to replicate and the materials could be found without any difficulties (table 4).

As for the responses regarding the program in general, the ratings were above average ($m=3.8$) on the questions about whether the program helped them enrich their children's schoolwork routine, or helped them build a routine at home ($m=3.7$). The majority of

respondents ($m=4.6$) indicated that they would recommend the type of programs used in this study for other families (table 5).

Summary of Comments

The total number of comments from the respondents was 24 (38%) ($N=64$). In general, the comments reflected congruency with the overall ratings contained in the first part of the survey described above.

As for the quality of the program, the respondents were pleased with its ability to maintain their level of interest. Many commented on the high quality of the video. This quality may be partially attributed to the professional quality of the production performed by Eastman Kodak. The comments on the quality of the information were also positive. Most of the comments on this element of the program pointed out that the information was easy to understand and the activities easy to replicate. One respondent liked the idea of viewer control as she could use the program with her "child little by little."

The comments related to the usefulness of the information to the individual parent yielded more data about individual low ratings on the Likert scales. Most of these respondents thought the activities were too basic for their children. The child either became bored or the activities were not attempted after the initial viewing. This also accounts for some of the reasons why the program was not completed. Other reasons included: lack of time and a broken VCR. None of the responses indicated not having a VCR as the main reason for not implementing the

program. One parent's response indicated a language barrier as the main reason for not implementing the program.

The suggestions for the improvement of the program were related to the specific needs of the individual child and family. Therefore, the generalizations of these suggestions are not based on a weighed-number for a specific category.

Some respondents suggested to expand the program to reach more families in the district as well as for families with children of pre-kindergarten age. A similar suggestion was expressed with regards to sending the program home earlier in the year, or even before the beginning of the school year. On the other hand, none of the respondents suggested more challenging activities for children with more advanced skills.

One respondent suggested a need to have more minority representation in the video as teachers and actors. Another suggestion pointed out that the program should have a version in Spanish.

Table 1

Number and % of Responses on Demographic Data

Data	<u>N</u> = 64	<u>N</u> %	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u> % of <u>N</u>	Mean
Age	48	75%			30.4 (years)
Children	63	98%			2.7 (children)
Gender	54	84%			
Male			4	6%	
Female			50	78%	
Status	54	84%			
Single			28	44%	
Married			26	41%	
Education	57	89%			
Below 9th			5	8%	
High School			19	14%	
College			33	52%	
Residence	58	91%			
Neighborhood			38	59%	
Other neighborhood			20	31%	

Table 2

Number and % of Responses on Program Implementation

Activity	<u>N</u> = 64	<u>N</u> %	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u> % of <u>N</u>
Used program	58	91%		
Manual			1	2%
Videocassette			16	25%
Both			41	64%
Completed program	63	98%		
Yes			48	75%
No			15	23%

Table 3

Mean Rating for Responses on Program Quality

Section 1			
Statement/ Question.	N=64	N%	Mean
1-The information in this section was useful to you.	63	98%	4.0
2-The information in this section is useful to parents in general.	62	97%	4.4
3-Did you learn any new information in this section?	58	91%	3.6
4-The information presented was easy to understand.	62	91%	4.7

Table 4

Mean Rating for Responses on Program Quality

Section 2			
Statement/ Question	<u>N</u> =64	<u>N</u> %	Mean
1-The information in this section was useful to you.	56	88%	4.1
2-The information in this section is useful to parents in general.	55	86%	4.4
3-Did you learn any new information in this section?	54	84%	3.7
4-Were the activities in this section easy to replicate at home?	56	88%	4.7
5-Were you able to find the materials needed for the activities?	55	86%	4.5

Table 5

Mean Rating for Responses on Program Quality

Whole Program

Statement/ Question	<u>N</u> =64	<u>N</u> %	Mean
1-This program helped me build a school routine with my child.	53	83%	3.7
2-This program helped me enrich my child's schoolwork routine.	55	86%	3.8
3-Would you recommend these type (video & manual) of programs for other families?	56	88%	4.6

Chapter V

Discussion

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the initial perceptions on the effectiveness of using a program that integrates videocassette technology and an illustrated pamphlet for the purpose of educating and engaging parents of kindergarten students at home. The study concentrated on finding information about parent receptiveness towards the approach used to implement the program; usefulness of the content, accounts of increased parent-child interaction at home; and feedback on what modifications would be needed to improve the program.

Conclusions

The results of this study seem to support the conclusion that videocassette technology is an effective additional tool for parental involvement programs in schools. Survey responses evidence Powell's (1989) concern about the need for research on program services and practices to enhance parental receptivity to innovative ideas. More specifically, the conclusion in this regard is that the majority of parents perhaps have always been receptive to sensible ideas that promote their children's academic development. The results seem to support the rationale and strategic plan for production and implementation of the program. However, one important variable that will need more attention in future studies of this nature is the one related to the question of the role

of viewer control and how it affects parental receptivity to the approach.

Implications

The question as to what extent did the study address the problem needs to be discussed in the context of its implications. The first implication relates to the validity of the generalizations that served as basis for the rationale and production of the program. The more thorough review of research supported the generalizations. In addition, the results directly connected many of the responses with the generalizations used to attain accuracy in the program's quality. Nevertheless, the wealth of research in the area of parental involvement should be enough motivation for any educational institution to deny itself the risk of inaccurate information when designing programs of this nature.

The second, is in the context of the quality of the data obtained for the purpose of improving the program. There was a marked discrepancy between the target population profile and the actual profile of the population reached by the program. As evidenced by the references used to create a profile of the target population (Ascher, 1988; 1994-95 Rochester City School District Budget Report; Children's Defense Fund, 1994; Jennings, 1990; Swick, 1991), the design was aimed at a population most likely to be afflicted by the reported general condition of urban America. In contrast, the responses in the demographics section of the study reflected the average respondent to be most likely a 30 year old, married or unmarried, well educated female, with three children, and

living in the neighborhood of the school.

The discrepancy in demographics generated an unexpected valuable piece of information related to the quality of the program and its implication for the school. Although the study may have not been completely successful in obtaining data from the target population, nevertheless it did reach a population that comprised an average respondent whom otherwise would have been neglected. The responses from these subjects, however, did not reject the generalizations used as a basis for the design of the program..In addition, the suggestions for the improvement of the program did not place the needs of these respondents in a category in which the program has to be any different from a program designed for the population fitting the target profile.

The third area of implications is related to the approach of the school in its effort to elicit more parental involvement. Although there was no guarantee that the program would be implemented at home in any capacity, the school was successful in providing all the families with access to the information. This "blanket" approach eliminated the variable of limited accessibility. Parental involvement programs in which the organization controls variables of time and place (usually meaning that families are the ones coming into the school) will always have the problem of not being 100% accessible. Based on the results of this study, it is also safe to conclude that families are receptive to the accessibility of

information in the format of videocassette and illustrated manual.

For many organizations the videocassette approach can be deemed as costly. The production cost per minute for programs such as the one used for this study was quoted by Eastman Kodak in a range from \$500.00 to almost \$1,000 (depending on the quality). Thus, the implication for learning institutions is that not only do they have to be creative in terms of the content and development of these types of programs but also creative in terms of how to finance these projects. Many ideas have yet to be explored by organizations that want to develop similar programs. Ideas such as grants that would fully or partially fund these programs, or a partnership approach between two or more schools or districts in a generic production can help minimize costs.

The need for longitudinal studies related to the use of the videocassette technology approach for parental involvement is evidenced by the scarcity of studies found on this particular subject. If one accepts the premise that the main reason for schools to promote parental involvement is to improve academic achievement, then it would be fair to conclude that it is in the best interest of the scholarly community to pursue knowledge to this end. On the other hand, allusions of scholarly neglect may not be completely accurate if one hypothesizes that perhaps the rapid proliferation and changes in this technology have out paced the rate at which research is being (or can be) conducted. The implications of researching this hypothesis may reach beyond the

videocassette technology addressed by this study to the area of computers or other technology for which educational institutions may need timely research.

Summary

This study shows an example of how an organization realized and adapted a potential use of a relatively new technology as another tool in its menu of strategies for parental involvement. The findings show encouraging results on the effectiveness of this approach. The organization was able to combine three elements in the development of its approach that should serve as guidelines for organizations developing programs of the same nature. The first was accurately defining the problem at hand; second, matching the solution with the best available resources; and third, implementing and evaluating in a timely manner.

The overall information yielded by this study not only revealed conclusions and implications directly connected to the program but also connected to the context in which research is conducted today. Observations on the rapid proliferation of videocassette technology cited in chapter II and the scarcity of studies mentioned above generated questions applicable to other forms of technology that are having a marked impact in education and for which valuable research is needed.

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